**1850-1914ish**

American Realism, Naturalism and Regionalism

**Realism (noun):** the art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring-worm.

**–– Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911)**

**What brought about Realism?**

* A reaction against 
  + rejected heroic, adventurous, or unfamiliar subjects
* The emerging brings increasing rates of literacy as well as the rise of popular literature – elitist literary movements (e.g. Romanticism) lessen with pressure for realistic portrayals of American population
* The harsh reality of the and shattered the nation’s idealism
* The and of America
* Upheaval and in the latter half of the 19th century

**Romanticism versus Realism**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Romanticism**   * Aspired to the ideal * Thought to be more genteel since it did not show the vulgar details of life * Renders reality in less volume and detail. * Prefers action to character. * Reality does not impinge as frequently on the action of the piece as in a novel. * Characters not as complexly related to each other or to their society. * Human relationships tend to be narrowly or obsessively involved rather than displaying a range of human relationships. * Origins and class of characters sometimes irrelevant, sometimes a mystery. * Plot is highly colored, featuring astonishing events that have symbolic or allegorical import. * Tends toward mythic, allegorical, or symbolic forms; Heightened diction. | **Realism**   * Thought to be more * Critics stressed its potential for and its emphasis on the * Potential “” for the pure of mind * Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. * is more important than action and plot; Complex ethical choices are often the subject. * Characters appear in their real of temperament and motive; they are in a complex relationship or conflict with nature, with each other, with their social class, with their own past. * Events will usually be . Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances. * is important; the realist novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class. * is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; Tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact. * becomes increasingly important – overt authorial comments or intrusions lessen as the century progresses |

**The Civil War**

* The industrialized North defeated the agrarian South, and the United States headed toward capitalism.
* The war taught men that life, man and God were not so or .
* The war marked a change in the quality of American life, a **deterioration** of American moral values.

**1880s Urbanization**

* Commerce took the lead in the national economy with the movement from free commerce to monopolization
* The spirit of became perverted into a .
* Increasing industrialization produced .
* Wealth and power were more and more concentrated in the hands of the few "captains of industry“.
* In the meantime, millions of people were  **.**

**Results of Industrialism**

* Cities became manufacturing centers and more people moved from rural areas into the cities to find jobs;
* A appeared, involved in manufacturing, wholesale and retail sales, banking, the legal and other professions, and the stock market.
* Advances in the technology of printing allowed cheaper production and
* Both of which provided fiction that appealed to the interests of .

**Influence of the Middle Class**

* The **spread of education**, through the proliferation of public and private schools in the industrialized western world;
* The cumulative effect of these conditions was the formation of a who saw its members as social and political protagonists;
* They wanted a literature that reflected its social structure, manners, and ethical values.

**Closing of the American Frontier**

* Now that the frontier was about to close and the safety valve was ceasing to operate. The American people lost their .

**The Gilded Age**

* Beneath the glittering surface of prosperity there lay suffering and unhappiness. What had been expected to be a Golden Age turned out to be a Gilded one.

**What is Realism?**

* A representation of reality in literature
* Emphasis on development of characters.
* Written in natural , or dialect.
* Prominent from 1860-1890.

**Characteristics of Realism**

* description of life
* character under circumstance
* rather than idealized
* close observation and investigation of life
* concerned with and problems
* **endings**: leaves room for readers to think for themselves.
* Protagonists are typical members of the middle class and reflect the attitudes and values as well as the customs and manners of this class (some characters may belong to other classes).
* Unlike romantic heroes and villains, the characters are neither extremely good nor extremely bad, but have a mixture of both qualities.

**Howells on Realism**

“Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material”

–– William Dean Howells, November 1889

**What is Regionalism?**

* Often called “.”
* Focuses on , , , , and other features specific to a certain region (e.g. the South)
* Coincided with Realism and sharing many of the same traits.
* Prominent from 1865-1895.
* Regionalist Writers: Kate Chopin—South, Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman—New England, Mark Twain—West, Willa Cather—Midwest

**Why did Regionalism develop?**

* Dual influence of Romanticism and Realism
* The Civil War and the building of a national identity
* An outgrowth of realism with more focus on a particular setting and its influence over characters

**What is Naturalism?**

* Applied  **principles** of and to the study of human beings.
* Influenced by (natural selection) and (Freud)
* Posited that men were governed by and .
* Often depict man in with nature, society, or himself.
* Prominent from 1880-1920(ish)

A man said to the universe:    
"Sir, I exist!"    
"However," replied the universe,   
"The fact has not created in me    
A sense of obligation.”

--Stephen Crane (1894, 1899)

**Why did Naturalism develop?**

* The swell of in the latter half of the 19th century, which led to a larger lower class and increased poverty in the cities
* The prominence of and the theories of
* in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction
* Publication of *Origin of the Species*

**Characteristics of Naturalism**

* Themes: , , and issues (such as gender and race).
* Conflict: man versus , man versus
* Characters against pressures that threaten to release the " ."
* Characters are often (but not always) in
* Nature is an or force acting on the lives of human beings.
* Forces of and as they affect and afflict--individual lives.
* Naturalist Writers: Stephen Crane, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Katherine Anne Porter, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton

**Points to Remember…**

* Realism, Regionalism, and Naturalism are and .
* Their influence has dominated most literature created since 1920, though the movement itself is dated to roughly that point.
* They are truly American modes of writing.

**Read pages 466-473 and list below at least ten additional points about the literature of this period – be sure to distinguish your notes by whether the stylistic characteristic relates to realism, regionalism**